NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

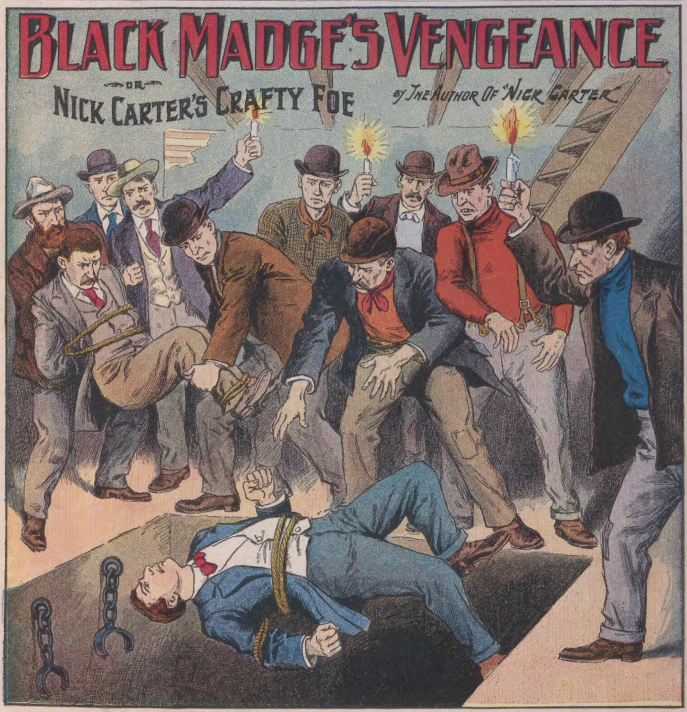
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 543 NEW YORK, MAY 25, 1907. Price, Five Cents

BLACK MADGE'S VENGEANCE

OR NICK CARTER'S CRAFTY FOE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



After capturing Chick and Curly, they were bound, then thrown into the hole, where they were chained to the wall and left to feed the rats.

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Black Madge's Vengeance

OR,

NICK CARTER'S CRAFTY FOE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

BLACK MADGE'S THREAT.

Nick Carter found the following letter on his breakfast-table one morning:

"NICK CARTER: One month ago—how time flies—I wrote to you as follows: 'I haven't done with you yet, Nick Carter. I will never forgive you for fooling me as you did. I shall manage to get my liberty again somehow, some time, and when I do, it will be for the purpose of wreaking vengeance upon you. And I will get even some day, never fear.'

"That was a month ago. I thought when I wrote that it might take a year—but they are easy marks in this State.

"It was my hope after you captured me and all my followers within our stronghold in the mountains, north of the railroad-tracks, that I would have a chance to see you again, and to talk to you before I was taken away to prison. You would say probably that I wanted to boast; for a threat, after all, is only another kind of boasting. But it wasn't so, Nick Carter; I wanted to tell you what you had succeeded in doing; and this is it:

"You have succeeded in creating in me a passion which supersedes all others in my nature—the passion of hatred.

"Twice now you have foiled me; twice you have been successful in arresting me, and the latter of these two times you not only destroyed the organization which I had created, and rendered it utterly impotent for my future uses, but you destroyed almost at one blow every ambition that I had through that organization and by reason of it.

"You didn't know that, and you couldn't appreciate it; and it wouldn't matter at all to you if you had; neither has it anything to do with the purport of this letter.

"I know you will say that I am a fool to take the trouble to warn you, but I would be less than a woman, and much less than the bad woman I am, if I did not take this opportunity of exulting over the chance that is now promised to me to get square with you.

"Heretofore my every effort has been centered upon playing on my fellow men; heretofore I have had only two thoughts in pursuing my career; one was to create an organization of which I was the supreme head, and the other was to secure by the operation of that organization all the money that it was possible to obtain.

"I have always been a thief with a system. My robberies have all been committed after careful planning; you know that because of the one you helped to commit yourself when you were playing the spy upon me, at the time my headquarters was in the swamp below the track—the first time you fooled me and arrested me.

"But now I have only one ambition left—to get square with you.

"I haven't decided yet how I shall do it; or when; or where it shall be done. If I had so decided I would not tell you, so it makes no difference.

"But I have been a hard student, Nick Carter, of many things. I have had good instructors in the science of mixing and using poisons; there is no person living to-day, man or woman—yourself included—who is a better marksman than I am with firearms; there is no person, man or woman, who is more adept to-day in the use of all weapons than I am.

"This is not boasting; it is fact.

"Moreover, I have the power to appear in many guises—disguises you might call them. In one or more of them—perhaps in many of them—I shall appear to you, and when you are least expecting it I shall strike.

"Don't think by that that I mean to strike you dead. That would not be making you suffer enough; but I shall find other and better ways in which to strike—ways that will make you suffer and realize what you did when you made me your enemy, and made me hate you as I do.

"And another thing; I have already set to work to bring together, as rapidly as I can find them, people who have criminal records and who have reason to hate you as I do; people whom you have pursued as you have pursued me; those whom you have sent to prison; those whose careers you have interrupted; those you have threatened; and those who have cause for holding a grudge against you.

"I have sought many of those, and I have found many. I am still seeking others, and I shall find more; and when I have got together enough of them, and have selected from that number those whom I deem most available for my purpose and competent to carry out my directions as I shall give them, I shall organize them into a 'Band of Hatred,' the sole object of which shall be your undoing and, ultimately, your death.

"You have preyed too long already upon that class of humanity to which I belong, and from our standpoint your position is much the same as is our position from yours.

"You know me well enough, Nick Carter, to know that from this moment forward you will never be safe from danger for one moment of your life; whether you are sleeping or waking; whether you are afloat or ashore; whether you are quartered in the seclusion of your own study at home, or are abroad upon the streets of the city.

"You know that I do not threaten idly. You know that I am a woman with a purpose. You know that I am intelligent, educated, and determined. You know that I am a woman to be feared.

"I have thought this matter all over, and decided upon it during those hours when I was locked in the cabin up there in the hills north of the railroad-tracks, after you had drugged and so overcome the men of my company, and succeeded in capturing us all.

"When I was taken to prison I knew that it would be only a short time before I would be able to make good my escape.

"How I have succeeded in accomplishing it does not matter. I have found one key in my experience that never fails to open prison-locks, if it is properly applied; the fact that it is made of gold is sufficient explanation, and gold I had in plenty, for I have always been successful, and even now I have hoards concealed in different places which will supply me with funds more than sufficient to carry out to the bitter end this campaign of vengeance upon which I have determined.

"I think that is all.

"I shall leave here for New York City an hour after this letter is put in the mail. When you will see me first I do not know. BLACK MADGE."

The detective read this remarkable letter twice from beginning to end, and then he passed it in silence across the table to Chick, who was seated opposite to him.

And Chick also read it twice in silence, and as silently returned it.

But Nick, realizing that Ten-Ichi and Patsy would also fall under the sweeping hatred of Black Madge, tossed it over to them with the direction that they read it also.

There was not one among them who felt like making any comment upon the letter, or its contents, at least until their chief had spoken; but presently, with a gesture to Chick, which meant that he was to follow him as soon as he had finished his breakfast, the detective left the table and went to his study.

It was only a few moments after that when Chick entered the room smiling.

"I hope, Nick," he said, dropping into a chair near the window and lighting a cigar, "that you enjoyed the reading of that letter from Madge?"

The detective was silent a moment before he replied, and then quite slowly he said:

"So far as I am personally concerned, Chick, the letter or its contents has no more effect upon me than the snapping of your fingers, but I will confess that I am in some dread concerning what she might do to you, and to Ten-Ichi and Patsy."

Chick leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud.

"If you will excuse me for saying so," he remarked, "that is utter nonsense. Of course, the boys down-stairs and I are quite capable of taking care of ourselves."

"I don't doubt that," said Nick, "but that is not exactly the point."

"What is, then?"

"You have forgotten one part of her letter," said Nick.

"What part?"

"That part wherein she speaks about making me suffer, rather than attempting to do me physical harm."

"Oh! I haven't forgotten it."

"Do you understand what she means by that, Chick?"

"Certainly."

"Let me hear if you do."

"Well, she probably means that it would be her first effort to make you suffer by injuring those whom you love—in other words, by doing something or other to one of us. But forewarned is forearmed, and, anyhow, I don't think it behooves any of us to be afraid of a woman."

"This is a case," said Nick, "where a woman is much more dangerous than a man. A man would fight out in the open; a woman will fight in the shadow; or at least such a woman as that will. She is a pretty bad one, Chick, and a grave foe."

Chick nodded.

"It is always best," continued the detective, "to give your enemy or your adversaries credit for every advantage they possess. Black Madge is a wonderfully smart woman, and is unprincipled and implacable as she is smart. She will halt at nothing to carry out her design of vengeance, and just as sure as you are sitting there, Chick, we will presently feel the surety of that threat."

Chick flicked the ashes from his cigar, and then strode across the room to the window, where he stood for a moment looking out.

"I don't see exactly what we are going to do to head her off before she begins," he said presently.

"There is nothing to do," replied Nick gloomily.

"Upon my word," said Chick, laughing, "one would think that you were more than usually affected by that letter from Madge. Do you really take it so seriously as all that?"

"I take it seriously," replied the detective, "because I so well understand what the women means, and she means just what she says. Instead of going on evenly and living the life we have been living, we must not be for an instant off our guard from this day on, until she is again behind the bars, and I hope the next time I arrest her it will be within the limits of the State of New York, where I can place a watch over her so that she will not escape."

"And I hope so, too," said Chick.

"And now, in the meantime," continued Nick, smiling, "since we have this letter and know what she is about to do, I think we will meet her half-way, and not wait for her to open the ball. Since she is at liberty, we will set about capturing her at once."

CHAPTER II.

THE MEETING OF THE AVENGERS.

Now it will be necessary for a moment to look in upon Black Madge herself, for all that will be told about her became known later on to the detective, and for the sake of the chronology of our story it should be told here.

Down on the East Side of New York, in Rivington Street, and some distance east of the Bowery, on the second floor of one of the oldest buildings in the city, a remarkable meeting was being held during the night that followed the receipt of the foregoing letter by Nick Carter.

In a room on this floor, which was brilliantly lighted by four gas-jets blazing from the chandelier, nine people were seated.

They were gathered along two sides of the room, in which was a center-table, and facing behind this table was Black Madge, the Queen of the Yeggmen, by whom the letter referred to was written and sent.

Before her on the table were various sheets of letter-paper, which she had turned from a pad one after another as she made notes upon them, and in her hand she held a pencil which ever and anon flew rapidly over the paper while she recorded such information concerning those who were present with her as she cared to remember.

They had been present in that room for upward of an hour, and during that time Madge had questioned each one of the eight who faced her concerning the statements they had made, and which she had noted.

Now she leaned back in her chair, and, holding one of the sheets of paper in her hand, she said:

"Stand up, Scar-faced Johnny, and answer the questions I shall ask you."

One of the men, a short, stocky, red-headed, brutalized being, who was almost as broad as he was long, leaped to his feet, thrust his hands deeply into his pockets, and with his chin stuck forward aggressively, waited.

"You hate Nick Carter, do you, Johnny?" Madge asked.

"I hate him like poison."

"And you would kill him if you could?"

"I'd cut his throat in half a minute if I was sure of not being caught."

"Tell me again why you hate him so."

"Ain't he sent me twice to prison? Once for four years and once for three. And the last time he done it didn't he hand me a welt alongside of the jaw that I'll never forget? A man can't hit me like that and have me love him afterward. You just show me the way to do it, Black Madge, and I'll lay him out cold—so cold that he'll never get over it again. All I want is a chance."

"All right," said Madge, "take your seat.

"Now, Slippery Al, you stand up. What's your line of graft, Slippery?"

Slippery, who was tall, and sallow, and lean, and un-

kempt, and who looked consumptive and otherwise unwholesome, grinned sheepishly, as he replied:

"I reckon my name ought to answer that question. I slips in and I slips out where I can and when I can, and picks up anything that's lying around."

Madge laughed scornfully.

"You don't look as if you had sense enough to hate anybody or anything," she said.

"Oh, I hate Nick Carter, right enough," was the unhesitating reply.

"Why do you hate him?"

"Because he sent my father and my mother and my two brothers to prison, and they're all there now, and they weren't doing a thing that interfered with him in any way."

"What were they doing?" asked Madge.

"Well, if you want to know it straight, Black Madge, they was running a little counterfeit-plant of their own—making dimes and quarters and a few half-dollars for some of us to blow in when we couldn't find the real rhino."

"Running a counterfeit-plant, eh?"

"That's it, marm."

"And Nick Carter sent them all to prison, did he?"

"He did that."

"How does it happen that he didn't send you along with them?"

"Well, I managed to slip out just in time," said Slippery, with one of his sheepish grins; "but he sent a bullet after me when I was running away that singed the hair over my right ear, and taking it all in all I hate him about as much as anybody."

"Not enough to kill him if I should ask you to do it, do you?"

"Well, Madge, when it comes to killing, that ain't in my line; but if you want me to lead him on somehow where somebody else could do the job, I think I'd be about the covey that could do it."

"That'll do for you. Sit down, Slippery."

"What's your name?" she added to the man who was next him.

A dark, beetle-browed, heavy-jawed, coarse-featured man, who looked as if he was as powerful as a giant, rose slowly to his feet, and first having shut his teeth together with a snap that could be heard all over the room, and allow them to part again, while he replied in a surly tone, and with an ugly glitter in his eyes:

"I have got about forty names; leastwise, the police say I have; but they as knows me best calls me Bob for short; sometimes they fixes it up a little by calling it Surly Bob. But I think that Bob will do for you."

"What have you got against Nick Carter, Surly Bob?" asked Madge, smiling. She liked the looks of this hard-featured individual. He was just brutal enough in his appearance to satisfy her ideas of what a man should be.

Bob deliberately took a huge chew of tobacco into his mouth before he replied, and then, with a slow and almost bovine indifference, he responded:

"I don't know as it makes much difference to you, Black Madge, what I hate him for as long as I do hate him, and I'm bound to get square with him some day, whether I do it in connection with this organization that you're getting together or on my own hook without the help of any of you," and he glanced defiantly around. "It's enough that I do hate him. He's done enough to me to make me hate him. It's enough if I had him alone in this room to-night one of us would never leave it alive unless he got the best of me without killing me, for I would certainly do him if I got half a chance.

"But I'll tell you one thing about him that maybe it will do some of you good to hear, for I give you fair warning that you want to give Nick Carter a wide berth unless you can manage somehow to catch him foul. He's about as strong as three horses, and if he ever succeeds in getting his grip on you you're gone. I'm about as tough as they make them, but I'm a wee baby in Nick Carter's hands, and don't any of you forget it."

"Tell us the story," said Madge.

"Oh, it ain't no story; it's just a short account. We ran into each other once near the front door of a bank I had gone into after hours and without the permission of the president and board of directors. When I picked myself up from the middle of the street after he grabbed me there was a crack in the top of my skull which didn't get well for three months. That's all I've got to say about it, but I want to add this: If that fellow Slippery Al, who says killing ain't in his line, but leading astray is, wants to bring Nick Carter my way, and will fetch him along so as I can get him foul, I'll fix him for keeps, and no questions asked."

And Surly Bob sat down.

He had no sooner taken his seat than the individual next to him sprang up without waiting to be asked to do so.

If you had encountered this individual along Broadway or on Fifth Avenue in New York City, you might not have devoted a second glance to him; but if you had, and still had not studied him closely, you would not have thought him other than a gentleman.

His features were handsome or would have been handsome were it not for the crafty and shifty expression of his eyes and the otherwise insincerity that was manifest in his face.

Among his companions of the underworld he was known far and near as Gentleman Jim.

By profession he was what is known as a confidence man, although it was said of him that he had the courage to take any part that might be required of him in preying upon the world at large.

He had been known to assist, and to do it well, at a

bank-burglary. He had once lived for some time in Chicago as a highwayman. It was said of him that in his youth he had begun his career of crime by rustling cattle in the far West, and that he was as quick and as sure with a gun as any "bad man" of that region.

His attire was immaculate and in the height of fashion. He was clean-shaven, and he wore eye-glasses which gave to him somewhat of a professional look, and which he had been heard to say were excellent things to hide the expression in a man's eyes.

In stature he was tall, rather broad, and extremely well built. In short, Madge looked upon him when he rose with undoubted admiration in her eyes, as if she believed that here was a man who could be anything he chose to be in the criminal world.

When he spoke it was in an evenly modulated tone of voice which might have done excellent service in a drawing-room; and, moreover, his voice was pleasant to listen to.

"I suppose you would like to hear from me, as well as from the others, Madge," he said slowly, while he drew a silver cigarette-box from his pocket, and, having extracted a "coffin-nail" therefrom, lit it. "I haven't got very much to say, except that I don't take much stock in boasted hatreds. Where I was raised, and where I began my career—and I am not particularly proud of that career—when we hated anybody we rarely said much about it, but I will say this to you, and to the others who are here: I am very glad that this organization is being perfected. I am very glad that some concerted action is to be taken against this man, Nick Carter, who has come pretty near putting us all out of business. You all know who I am, and some of you have got a pretty good idea what I am. Nick Carter knows about as much about me as any of you, which, after all is said, is next to nothing at all. But I have been on a still hunt for Mr. Nick Carter for some time, and when I get him in a position which Surly Bob calls foul, I sha'n't wait to send to any of you for assistance. I'll do the rest myself."

CHAPTER III.

THE BAND OF HATRED.

"And now you," said Madge, fixing her eyes upon the individual who was seated next to Gentleman Jim. "Rise in your place and tell us your name, and make us a little speech, as the others have done."

"My name is Cummings—Fly Cummings, I'm called. Some of the bunch here knows me and some don't. Those that do know me don't need to be told anything about me, and those that don't know me are just as well off. I'm in business for myself, and always have been. The world owes me a living, and it's been paying it pretty regular ever since I was sixteen years old, and I'm now coming sixty-two. I'm like the others here in one respect: I've got a grudge against the man we've been talking about. I've never been able to make him feel it, because I've always fought mighty shy of him rather than get within his reach; but when I heard that this here movement had been started going by you, Madge, and the word was passed around among the guns downtown that you wanted a few of us that hated Nick Carter to come to the captain's office and form a little organization, it struck me that it was just about the right thing to do. I've heard what Surly Bob had to say, and I know that Surly isn't the sort of chap that's in the habit of talking through his hat. If Surly Bob had it in for me I'd patronize the New York Central Railroad, and take a train out of town right away.

"I've heard what Gentleman Jim had to say, and if Jim was looking for my gore to-night, I'd take a steamer across the ocean or commit suicide, because I'd know I couldn't get away from him in any other way.

"I've heard what Slippery Al had to say, and while Slippery ain't of much account, he's about the nastiest toad that ever picked a pocket, and I wouldn't care to have him down on me.

"And as for Scar-faced Johnny, well, Johnny is a bad one, too. I ain't making any threats particularly, Madge, but I'm willing to join this organization, or I wouldn't be here, and I want to say now that when you're fixing up the business, and arrange for the signals so that we can summons each other when we want them, I'll do my part to the tune of compound interest; and I guess that'll be about all from me."

The sixth man of the party, who was the next to get upon his feet, had the stamp of prison life all over him.

His face bespoke the pallor which is acquired in no other place in the world, and the vicious, shifty, sneaking gleam in his eyes spoke well of the craftiness which is the result of long confinement under the domination of brutal guards and turnkeys.

So recently had he escaped from prison, apparently, that his hair was still cropped short to his skull, and one almost expected when looking at him to see the stripes of prison garb upon him.

"I am Joe Cuthbert," he said slowly, in a tone so low that it could scarcely be heard. "I wouldn't have come here to-night at all if I hadn't been assured on the level that it would be perfectly safe to do so.

"I don't think there is any one of you in this room except Madge herself who knows me, but you will all hear from me later on as sure as I'm alive and can escape arrest.

"You may have been told since you came here that I have just escaped from prison, or if you haven't been told it, and know how to read, you have probably seen the rewards for my recapture. You will know, too, that I was sent up for croaking another chap, or, as they call it in the courts, for murder. I want you all to know that

I served eight years. Eight years of hell, and that I've come out of there with the determination of getting square with the man that sent me up. That man was Nick Carter; and that's all I've got to say."

There was a moment of utter silence after this announcement, which had in it many of the elements of the dramatic.

There was not a person in that room who had not seen the inside of a prison, and many of them had served as many as four years, while others had been in prison many times for short terms.

But to have just escaped from prison after having been confined for eight long years seemed to them the climax of the possibilities of hatred.

But the moment passed, and Madge fixed her eyes upon the seventh of the group, who slowly rose to his feet and said:

"After what we've just heard, Madge, it doesn't seem that anything that I can say can add to the intensity of feeling that pervades this distinguished assembly. I regard it as quite an honor to be among those who know so well how to hate. As for me, I have also been inside a prison, to which this man Nick Carter sent me. I had been mixed up in a little diamond-robbery from one of the big firms in this town. I don't know but maybe some of you heard about it; it was called the taking of the pear-shaped diamonds, and at the time that happened I was in love with a very beautiful girl, and was outwardly leading a very respectable life. It's enough for me to say now that when the exposure that followed Nick Carter's investigation of that case, and through it the exposure of all my previous criminal record, which before that time I had been able to conceal, the girl went back on me, and would have nothing more to do with me. Now she is married to another man, and while I don't blame her any, I do blame the man that exposed me, and if any of you people that are gathered here can help me in getting square with him I'll be eternally grateful. My name is Eugene Maxwell."

There was only one other individual left in this collection who had not as yet spoken, and now, although Madge fixed her eyes instantly upon him, he remained in his chair as he was, with immovable, sphinxlike countenance and gloomy eyes.

He was a tall, spare, rather well-dressed figure, when he rose at last in reply to her spoken request, and he stood half-leaning upon a cane which he held in his two hands, and bent a little toward her as he spoke.

"I haven't any name, so far as anybody knows," he said slowly, and with distinct and deliberate enunciation. "It has pleased my friends always to bestow a title upon me. Until to-night I have always worked alone, and have rarely made myself known to any of the inhabitants of the underworld, and if any of you here have ever happened to be told about The Parson, you will know who I am."

There was a distinct stir in the room when he uttered this name or title, for The Parson had always been more or less a mystery, and one that was much envied by thieves generally.

He was a confidence man of the higher type; the sort of man who would go into strange cities or villages or communities, and represent himself to be a professional man; sometimes a minister; sometimes a priest; again a rabbi; and it was his graft to solicit and collect contributions for charitable purposes upon forged recommendations and letters which he had prepared in advance.

His success in this line had been enormous, and his work had always been done in the dark and alone, until six years before this particular occasion, having done it once too often, Nick Carter had trailed him down and captured him.

He continued:

"I was always very successful in my line of graft until Nick Carter got after me, and while I didn't get quite so long a term as our friend Cuthbert, I was sent up for five years, and served four years and three months of it. I want to say to you now that every night and every morning of my life during those four years and three months, I cursed Nick Carter and everybody and everything that belongd to him. That's why I'm here. I take part in this little scheme that Madge has concocted to down that fellow with the greatest pleasure I have ever known. If you should happen to be in want of funds any time——"

"I'll supply the funds," interrupted Madge.

"All the same, if you should happen to be in want of funds at any time, all you've got to do is to whisper it to The Parson and I'll put my hand down in my pocket and supply the dollars, for I've got a few left, and I know where there are a lot more to be obtained."

He resumed his seat slowly, rested his chin upon the head of his cane between his hands, and the gloomy look came over his face again like a mask.

And now Madge stood up behind the table, resting her hands upon it, and leaning a little bit forward as she spoke.

"I'm a proud woman, my friends," she said. "I'm a young woman, too, being not yet twenty-four, and a good hater. I am part Spanish and part French. I was raised in Paris, and learned all that I know about my business over there. The first time that I ever saw Nick Carter in my life was in the office of the Prefecture of Police in the room of the Chief of the Secret Service. I was seventeen years old at the time when the chief had sent for me to question me about the death of a woman which had occurred in the house where I lived on the floor above me, and about which, fortunately, I knew absolutely nothing.

"But Nick Carter came into the chief's office while I

was there. I had only a fleeting glance of him at the time. I left the room almost as soon as he entered it. I did not see him again for five years, at which time he came in disguise to the thieves' headquarters where I was staying. I recognized him that time by his eyes, but nevertheless he captured me and sent me to jail.

"I escaped from that jail before I came to trial, and did it through the help of my friends.

"Somewhat later than that he hunted me down a second time, and as a consequence of that I spent some months in jail.

"I have sworn now to be even with him, and that is why I have brought you here together.

"You will please to stand up, now, raise your right hands, and repeat after me in taking the oath of 'The Band of Hatred.'"

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

A strange series of accidents began the night of the day following the receipt of the letter, and Nick Carter had no doubt whatever that it was the first act to be played in the drama of vengeance which Black Madge had inaugurated against them.

It was rather a simple thing of itself, and did no damage to amount to anything. The fact was that during the night some malicious person had placed under the front steps in the areaway of his house a barrel that had been filled with cotton waste saturated with oil. It was only necessary after that to apply a match to the inflammable material to start an incipient conflagration. Had the house itself not been built of granite, and—save the doors and windows and other trimmings—been practically fireproof, the result would have been disastrous; as it was, however, beyond badly scorching the door, and cracking a few of the stones by reason of the intense heat that was generating, no damage was done.

But the fact had been sufficient to remind Nick Carter and his three assistants that Madge had not threatened idly, and that already she had undertaken to carry out the substance of some of her warning.

At midnight the day following the fire in the areaway a blazing fire-bomb was hurled through the window of the second floor of Nick Carter's house, and rolled to the middle of the floor, where it blazed furiously, and would undoubtedly have done a great deal of damage had it not so happened that the housekeeper was present at the time, for Nick had a guest that night, and she had been called late to prepare the room for him.

The day following this one, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Joseph discovered a dynamite cartridge containing a pound and a half of the explosive in the vestibule at the front door. The fuse of this cartridge was already alight and would have reached and exploded the percussion, or detonating-cap, if Joseph, for some reason unknown, had not gone to the front door at that moment. He was not called there, and had not heard anybody in the vestibule, or on the steps, and Joseph forever insisted after this incident that it was an intervention of Providence.

This last incident was extremely serious, for had the cartridge been exploded it must have torn away the entire front of the house, and have done enormous damage, even if it had taken no lives.

Friday night of that week at about half-past eight o'clock in the evening Chick and Patsy were walking up Madison Avenue together, and when they arrived at the corner of Thirtieth, and were about to turn toward Fifth Avenue, a shot was fired at them from across the street.

Fortunately the bullet did not strike either of them; and although they both immediately pursued the would-be assassin, he was evidently prepared to avoid them, for he leaped upon a bicycle and sped away so swiftly that there was no hope of overtaking him. They only saw that he was tall and slender, and that was all.

The Saturday morning following an express-wagon stopped at Nick Carter's house and delivered an express-package addressed to him, which was marked: "Fragile. This side up, with care."

Joseph carried it to the detective's study, placed it upon the table, and was about to leave the room when Nick stopped him.

"What is that, Joseph?" he asked.

"An express-package, sir, which just came for you."

"Who brought it, Joseph?"

"The express-wagon, sir."

"Bring it over here. Let me see it."

Joseph took the package in his hand, carried it over to place it on the desk in front of the detective, who regarded it with a smile, while strangely enough his mind went back to the number of attempts to injure him that had been made during the week that was now nearly past.

"Did you sign for it, Joseph?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I am expecting no package," said the detective.

"No, sir," said Joseph, not knowing what else to reply.

"I think, Joseph," said the detective, "that if you will take it to the basement, or rather to the laundry-room, and draw one of the tubs there full of water, it would be a good idea to put the package to soak for five or six hours before we open it."

"Really, sir," said Joseph. "Why?"

"Joseph, if that package had come here as it has a week or ten days ago, I should have opened it without a second thought, but, under the circumstances and considering all that has happened of late, I deem it wise to use every precaution. Take the package down and soak it as I have directed."

Some hours later when the detective recalled the inci-

dent to mind, he and Chick went to the basement together, found the package, and with a great deal of care opened it—from the bottom.

It was found to contain an infernal machine of the most approved pattern, loaded with broken glass, slugs of lead and old iron, and an assortment of nails, old keys, and bullets.

"A very pretty little present to send a fellow," said Nick, smiling grimly. "I rather think it is a lucky thing, Chick, that it occurred to me to give it a good soaking. I wonder what the woman will do next?"

Sunday evening when the detective entered his room he found Joseph writhing on the floor in evident agony, brought about by the contents of what had been a box of candy, and Nick instantly guessed that another attempt had been made upon his life, this time to poison him.

But Joseph fortunately had only nibbled at one of the pieces, and, beyond an hour's suffering for his foolishness, was not injured.

It appeared, when Nick questioned him, that the boy had handed the box of candy in at the door, saying, when Joseph appeared to receive it, that it had been ordered by the detective himself, and was to be placed in his study for him; and the boy had had the temerity to raise the lid of the box when he delivered it, wink slyly at Joseph, and exclaim:

"See! aren't they dandy? I tasted one; they're fine."

And then he had run away, laughing.

Joseph had seen the candy, and, being fond of it, could not resist the temptation also to take a taste of it when he placed the box upon his master's table. The result we know.

That same night, at half-past eleven o'clock, Nick was seated at the desk in his study—which everybody who is familiar with these stories knows to be located on the third floor in the rear of his house—and was engaged in looking over some notes relative to an old case which he wished to recall to mind.

The shade at the window was lowered, but the light was in such a position that it threw his shadow against the curtain and outlined his head upon it almost perfectly.

Suddenly he was startled by the report of a gun, and the next instant a bullet crashed through the glass of his window, and buried itself in the opposite wall of the room.

Later on, when he investigated the incident, he found that the bullet had passed directly through the shadow of his head as it was cast upon the window-shade, the person who fired it evidently supposing that his head was directly behind that shadow; but the fact that the light was at one side of the room, and had therefore thrown the shadow somewhat back of where he was actually seated, saved his life.

Further investigation disclosed the fact that the bullet had been fired from the rear of one of the houses in the block directly behind where the detective lived. It was not discovered how the would-be assassin had secured his position on the roof.

But this accumulation of accidents—so called for want of a better term—was altogether too much for the serenity and the composure of the detective and his assistants.

It was evident that Madge had determined to make his life miserable if it could be done, and when Nick recalled the substance of the letter she had sent him he decided in his own mind that the bullet had not really been intended to take his life, but only to warn him of the dangers that were hovering over him every minute that he lived.

In the meantime—or rather during the time that has already been mentioned—the detective and his assistants had not been idle.

The writer will remember that in the conversation that followed upon the receipt of the letter, Nick had remarked that he would not wait for Black Madge to take the initiative in carrying out her threats, but that he would look for her, and if possible arrest her and send her back to prison, and the consequence of this determination was that there had not been a day or a night since that time when he and Chick and Patsy and Ten-Ichi had not been engaged in searching some part of the city for Black Madge, or for some trace of her.

They had visited the dens in the lower part of the city; they had questioned the policemen and the stool-pigeons of the detective bureau, and they had even gone so far as to communicate directly with crooks who were known to them for information concerning the woman.

But none had been forthcoming.

Black Madge was keeping herself as thoroughly under cover as if she were still in the prison in that other State from which she had escaped.

But after this occurrence of Sunday night, when the bullet was shot through the window at the detective, he determined to make no more half-hearted efforts to find Madge, but to set out at once that very night in search of her; and accordingly he put away his papers and called Chick into the room with him.

"Chick," he said, "do you happen to know anything about Mike Grinnel's place?"

"I only know," said Chick, "that he is said to keep one of the worst dives in the city, and that it is located somewhere, I believe, in Rivington Street. I am not sure about it, because I have never had occasion to go there. The only thing I do know about it is that it is said to be a great Sunday night resort for thieves and crooks of all classes."

"Right," said Nick. "That coincides with what I have heard. I have never been there, either, Chick, but I am going there to-night—now. The question is, do you want to go with me?"

"I sure do," replied Chick.

CHAPTER V.

CURLY JOHN, THE BANK THIEF.

Mike Grinnel's place in Rivington Street was at that time one of those monstrosities which were permitted to exist within the limits of New York City nobody knows how.

During the day and the early part of the evening it was to all appearances merely an ordinary saloon, and if a stranger were passing it he would regard it as a likely place to enter if he required refreshment.

But when the hours deepened into the night, the place gradually assumed more and more the aspect which might be labeled dangerous.

Men and women drifted in together and talked in low tones at tables arranged along the side of the room, and as the time continued toward midnight, and passed it, the air of respectability gradually disappeared until it was entirely gone.

By eleven o'clock the place was usually thronged by people who seemed to know each other in a furtive sort of way, and who sometimes would call others by name across the room.

At one o'clock the front doors were closed and locked; the curtains were tighly drawn so that not a ray of light was permitted to escape into the street, blinds were pulled up to make this fact doubly secure, and this was when the place really began to live and thrive in its true character. Then also was when Mike Grinnel himself came out of his shell, and assumed personal charge of the affairs of the place; for Mike Grinnel had a reputation among the crooks and thieves who were his customers, and if an incipient row started at any time among his guests he had only to look with his frowning brow in their direction to quell it.

The way into this dive of Grinnel's after the legal hours, and when it was supposed to be closed, was, strangely enough, through a house from the other side, and of course it followed that only the initiated—those who were known to the man at the door—could pass.

When Nick Carter and his first assistant left the house that particular Sunday night to go to Mike Grinnel's, the principal question was how they were to get inside the place at all.

Nick had no doubt in his mind whatever that if Black Madge were in town that she would be one who would most certainly visit Mike Grinnel's dive Sunday night, for that was the red-letter night of the week at that place among the inhabitants of the underworld.

He knew that she would feel perfectly secure against intervention there. He knew that she would have perfect confidence in the espionage which Mike Grinnel offered his place, and for the safety of his customers, for it was his boast that no thief or criminal of any sort had ever been arrested in his place and taken from it by the officers.

And therefore Nick felt sure that if he could but gain admission and Black Madge were in the city, which he did not doubt, he would find her there.

To enter a place of this kind one must be actually introduced; that is, vouched for by some frequenter of it. It will not suffice for one to apply at such a place, and state merely that he knows so-and-so and is all right; he will be turned down hard. But Nick Carter was never without resource in a matter of this knid, and therefore when he left the house with Chick, instead of going directly to Mike Grinnel's they took their way to police headquarters, where, as he knew would be the case, he found the inspector.

"Inspector," he said, "I noticed in the paper yesterday morning that Curly John had been arrested by one of your men and brought to headquarters on suspicion of being connected with that Liverpool bank-robbery three months ago."

"That's correct," said the inspector. "Do you know anything about the case?"

"Not a thing in the world," said Nick, laughing; "but I want to use Curly John. I want to use him very badly. I want you to lend him to me for to-night, if you will."

The inspector could only stare his amazement. He had known Nick Carter a good many years, but never before had he received a request of this kind from him.

"I guess you will have to say that again, and say it slow, Nick; I don't think I understand you."

The detective laughed heartily. Then he began at the beginning and told first about the letter he had received from Black Madge containing the threats, and then one by one related the incidents that had happened to him and to his household during the week that was past.

In conclusion, he said:

"Now, inspector, I am convinced that if Black Madge is in the city of New York, she is now at this very moment seated at one of the tables at Mike Grinnel's place. I want to go there to find out. If she is there I want to know it. If she is there and I can manage to find out where she goes when she leaves there, that is all I care to know to-night."

"But how can Curly help you?" asked the inspector.

"Curly can help me in this way. I know something about his reputation and his career. I came across him once several years ago in reference to an old case of mine with which he had nothing to do, but concerning which he gave me some valuable information. I found that Curly John was all right at that time, and, as people of his profession regard it, pretty much on the square. I want you, if you will, to ring the bell and order him brought up here and let me talk to him."

"That's easy," said the inspector, and he did as requested.

Five minutes later when Curly John entered the room he paused when he was just inside of the door, and fixed his eyes intently upon Nick Carter, and then, with scarcely a glance at the inspector, who had summoned him, he addressed himself directly to the detective.

"I know you," he said. "I remember you perfectly well, Mr. Carter, and I wouldn't be afraid to bet that it was you that sent for me right now. I hope you've come to get me out, for I give you my word that I know no more about that Liverpool crib-cracking business than you do, and that's what they're holding me for just now."

"Curly," said Nick, "you gave me some assistance once in a case I had after I assured you that you would not betray a pal in doing it, and that I would do a certain favor for you afterward. Did I keep my word with you?"

"You kept it for fair, Mr. Carter. I ain't forgot it, neither."

"Well, Curly, I have come here to-night to get you to do another favor for me, but first answer me one question."

"All right, sir. What's that?"

"Do they let you in at Mike Grinnel's Sunday night prayer-meetings?"

"They sure do, Mr. Carter."

"If you were at liberty at this minute, isn't that the first place you would point for?"

"That's about the size of it."

"And you would have no trouble in getting inside?"

"Not the least in the world."

"If the inspector will consent to let you go will you take me there—me and this young man beside me, who is my assistant—on condition that I make you a solemn promise that I will make no arrest while there; that I will in no way interfere with Grinnel's business, or with any of his customers who are there, and that unless you reveal the fact yourself it will never be known that I was inside the place?"

Curly John scratched his head in perplexity.

"That's a pretty big contract you ask of me, Mr. Carter," he said. "What's the game?"

"The game is, Curly, that I am very anxious to find out if a certain person is in the city. If that person is in the city that person will be at Grinnel's to-night, I know."

Curly scratched his head some more.

"And suppose, Mr. Carter, that person is at Grinnel's to-night, what do you expect to do to that person?"

"To use your own words," replied Nick, "not the least thing in the world."

"Then what do you want to go there for?"

"I have already told you that. I want to find out if that person is in the city."

"Are you giving me this on the square?" asked Curly John.

"Absolutely on the square."

"And you won't make any trouble?"

"Not a particle of trouble of any kind."

"You nor that chap over there who is with you?"

"Neither of us. You have my word for that."

"Well, what about what's to come after it? Do you intend to follow that person down and do the arresting afterward?"

"I will promise you, Curly, that there shall be no arrest of any kind or of any person arising out of the visit to Grinnel's place to-night within twenty-four hours from this moment."

Curly scratched his head a third time very intently and seriously, and at last asked:

"Don't any of them coves over there know you, Mr. Carter?"

"I suppose," said Nick, smiling, "that every one of them knows me, and that many of them know Chick as well."

"And so that's Chick, is it? I have heard about him. Well, now, Mr. Carter, let me ask you this. You just now said that unless I told it, not a soul would know that you were there at that place to-night if I took you there. Now, how do you reconcile that with the fact that they all know you?"

"In this way, Curly: That I shall ask you to wait here a few moments after you give your consent, while Chick and I step into the next room and make some alteration in our appearances with things that the inspector will loan me from his cabinet."

Curly sneered.

"Oh! this is a disguise-business, is it? Well, Mr. Carter, do you think that the guns down there at Grinnel's are such blamed fools as not to see through a racket of that kind?"

"Oh! I can fool them all right," said Nick, "if you consent. Now, Curly, I have given you a promise once be-

fore in my life, and lived up to it literally. I have made you one now, and I will live up to it literally. The inspector will let you go and will send for you in case he should want you again. You get your liberty, and I get what I want. And now, Curly, it's up to you. Will you do it?"

"Yes, by thunder, I'll do it! Go into the next room and get ready. When you're ready, I am. And I will introduce you and Chick there as a pair of old pals of mine from the other side of the water."

CHAPTER VI.

AT MIKE GRINNEL'S DIVE.

It has been stated already that the entrance to Mike Grinnel's dive during Sundays and after hours was through a house which fronted on another street, and that one had to be exceedingly well known to get past the guard who was stationed there.

Curly John, however, experienced no difficulty in accomplishing this apparently impossible feat.

When he rapped upon the door in a peculiar manner, that was evidently full of significance to the one behind it, it opened instantly, and the burly form of the bouncer of the establishment was discovered.

His face, which might have been a stone mask for all the expression it manifested when he first appeared, beamed with joy, however, when he discovered Curly John, and thrust out his big hamlike fist with undoubted enthusiasm.

"Hello, Curly," he said. "I thought you were in limbo."

"And so I was," replied Curly, "until they discovered that they didn't want me."

"Made up their minds that you wasn't in that little affair, eh?"

"That's the size of it, Red. Here's my two friends that I brought with me. Some one you don't know, and they ain't either of them known inside, either. Do you let them pass?"

"Sure, Curly. I lets them pass, if you say so."

"Come, lads," said Curly, without vouchsafing any further statement to the guard at the door; and so it was that the way was open for the two detectives to enter upon the mysteries of that infamous retreat where it was the proprietor's boast that no police officer had ever appeared without his own expressed permission.

The big room where the patrons congregated on Sunday night was comfortably filled when Nick Carter entered it with his two companions.

In all that place there were only two tables unoccupied, and one of those was almost directly in the center of the room.

Curly led the way to it at once, and the three seated themselves around it while the bank-burglar sent out his order for the refreshments that were required.

We have neglected to state that during the few moments that passed after Curly's consent to take them there, and before they departed from police headquarters, Nick and Chick had gone into the private room of the inspector, and made the necessary changes in their appearance; and each assumed the outward character and general aspect of a person who would be likely to frequent such a place as Grinnel's.

Nick Carter was always a thorough believer in the maxim that too much disguise was worse than none at all, and therefore when the occasion required that he should assume one, it was his habit to do as little real disguising as possible, and therefore with the exception of giving himself a black eye, and blocking out a couple of his teeth, fixing his face so that it appeared as though there was a couple days' growth of beard upon it, and donning a rough-looking costume, he was unchanged.

In a place like Mike Grinnel's no man thought of taking off his hat unless his head was too warm, and therefore Nick kept his on with the brim pulled down well over his eyes.

The mere fact that the two detectives were in the company of Curly John was sufficient voucher for their personalities, and it did not occur to anybody, not even to Mike Grinnel himself, to question them.

They were there; they were with Curly John; he had brought them, and that was enough.

And although there were many expressions of welcome spoken and called out to Curly John when he passed into the room and took his seat at the table, nobody in all that throng offered to approach him, for it was an unwritten law of the underworld that a man who reappears for the first time among his associates after imprisonment is left alone to make his own advances when he is pleased to do so.

As for the two strangers who accompanied him, their presence did not concern the others, so long as Curly John vouched for them.

If they thought anything about it at all they assumed that the burglar was preparing for another professional trip, and that the two strangers were interested in his plans. They all regarded it as none of their affair, and in the underworld it is the rule of life to mind your own business, and let other people do the same.

As soon as the detective had taken his seat—which he was careful to do in such a position that he could command a view of the greater part of the room without perceptibly turning his head—he began, little by little, and one by one, to study the people who were there.

At first he paid no attention whatever to the men; but since it was a fact that more than half of the guests, or patrons, or whatever you please to call them, were women, and as there were at least sixty persons present, it was some time before his eyes rested upon the face that he sought.

But Madge was there without question.

She had not thought it necessary to attempt any disguise of any sort, and her bold black eyes were roving restlessly about the room when Nick Carter encountered them.

But his own were so thoroughly shaded by the wide brim of the slouch he wore that he did not believe that she knew he was looking at her.

In this manner he studied her for some time, and discovered that she was furtively watching Curly John and the two who had come there with him.

It was apparent to the detective that Black Madge had not overcome her old habit of suspecting everybody; and the mere fact that there were two strangers present in the room, even though they were accompanied by one of the old habitués of the place, was to her a warning that they might not be all right.

It had been Nick's intention to make no demonstration of any kind while he was inside Grinnel's dive; it was his purpose to go there and observe all that he could, and then to go away again without having exchanged a word with any one except Curly, unless it should become absolutely necessary.

He intended—if he should succeed in finding Madge there—to trust to luck and his own ingenuity in science to follow her when she would leave the place, and so discover where she was living, and by that means he could keep his eye upon her for several days thereafter, and ultimately could round up the gang of crooks which he had no doubt she had organized.

But Madge, although she had no idea that either of the strangers might be Nick Carter, did not intend that these two men should leave that room without passing through some sort of inspection which would serve to identify them for what they might be.

While every one else in that place was thoroughly satisfied about them, because of their presence with Curly, this fact cut no ice with Black Madge, and always suspicious, she was instantly suspicious of them when they entered.

Therefore, a very short time had elapsed after the detectives took their seats at the table, before she left her own place and crossed the sawdust-covered floor swiftly to Curly's table.

There she slapped him on the shoulder as a man might have done, and with an extenuating laugh, which called the attention of every other person in the room to what she was doing, as she intended it to do, she exclaimed:

"Hello, Curly. It does me good to see you back among us again. How did you put out the lamps of those chaps up in Mulberry Street, so that they let you out?"

Curly, who was wise in his day and generation, jumped to his feet and shook hands heartily with Black Madge; for he guessed instantly that it was not to greet him that she had crossed the floor, but rather to gain a closer view of his companions, and by standing erect he could keep her a little distance without appearing to do so.

"Oh! they just found out they didn't want me," he replied. And then, realizing that something was expected of him by the others in the room, at least, if not Madge herself, he jerked a chair around toward her, and added: "Sit down, Madge, won't you, and have something?"

"Sure," she replied, laughing again, and dropped negligently into the chair.

"What kind of a game are you playing now, Madge?" asked Curly, after he had motioned to the waiter to approach; and then, pausing long enough to give the order, he added: "Last I heard of you you were behind the mosquito-bars resting up a bit."

Madge laughed again. She seemed to be full of laughter to-night, but it was an uneasy, imperfect, and significant sort of laughter that Nick Carter had heard from her lips before, and which he, therefore, understood. He realized now that it was important that he should proceed with great caution.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Nick Carter did that for me. But I'm out again, just the same, and now my lay is to get square with Nick Carter."

"You don't say so," said Curly, shifting uneasily in his chair, and forgetting himself so far as to cast one furtive glance in the direction of the detective. "What are you going to do to him?"

"Ask me that after I've got him where I want him," replied Madge, fixing her bold eyes full upon Nick Carter's face; and then, slowly removing them, and swinging her body half-around until she again faced Curly, she added insinuatingly:

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your friends, Curly?"

Curly shook his shoulders. He was on safe ground now, ground where he felt perfectly at home; for it was never necessary to indulge in introductions in that wake of life, not even when they were asked for, but he replied:

"Sure, Madge. These are my two friends, and I guess that'll be about enough. You can call them by any name you want to, and they'll both answer you."

"Under cover?" she asked.

"A little," admitted Curly.

"Are they dumb, or tongue-tied, or have they temporarily lost their voices; or are they only bashful? I should think that two full-grown men such as they are might be able to speak for themselves."

"It ain't always good taste to speak for yourself," said Curly, with an uneasy laugh. "They might do it once too often."

Madge's suspicions were plainly aroused. She remained silent for a moment after that, and then, leaning forward, she rested her arms upon the table, and with her face thrust well forward over them, again stared into the detective's face.

"Do you know who you are like?" she asked coolly.

"Yes," replied Nick, just as coolly as she had spoken, "I have heard it said often, but if you will take my advice you won't mention the name aloud. It might excite some of the people here."

She laughed.

"That's just what I mean to do," she said, with a tightening of her lips. "They need excitement; that's what they live on. It's what we all live on. It's what we come here to get. Excitement is the back-bone and muscle and sinew of our beings. And do you know that I think I could startle them all mightily right now if I should call something out to them which is on my mind to say."

She reached out her left hand and seized Curly by the shoulder, pulling him over to her, and then, in a tone which only the three who were present with her could hear, she went on, her voice deadly calm:

"Did you think, Nick Carter, that you could fool Black Madge? Did you think that you could come here into this same room where I am without my knowing instantly who you were? Don't you know that your very presence in the same room with me would make itself known to my sensibilities by reason of the very hate I bear you?"

She paused a moment and laughed uneasily.

And then she continued:

"Don't you know, Nick Carter, that you have walked directly into a trap from which you cannot escape? And were you not aware before you came here that if your identity became known your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase? If you so much as quiver an eyelid, Nick Carter, I will call out your name and point you out as a spy, and you know what that will mean in Mike Grinnel's dive."

CHAPTER VII.

BLACK MADGE'S DEFIANCE.

It was a crucial moment for each of the three men who were seated at that table, and it affected each of the three quite differently.

Chick was concerned only for the safety of his chief, for even then it did not occur to him that Black Madge had taken sufficient interest in himself to identify him, and that doubtless she still regarded him as really a friend of Curly's.

Curly was plainly frightened, as well as utterly astounded. It had never occurred to him that the disguise of Nick Carter, which had seemed to him to be perfect, would be, or could be, so readily penetrated; and he realized, for the moment, at least, that he was in as much danger as Nick Carter himself, for if it should be known to the others—or should suddenly be made known to them—that Nick Carter was in that room, they would not only kill the detective, but they would also murder the man who had dared to bring him there.

Black Madge was as thoroughly aware of this fact as was Curly himself, and she did the latter justice to believe that somehow he had been imposed upon by the detective, just as Nick had sought to impose upon all of them; in a word, she did not blame Curly for the existing situation.

As for the situation itself, she was delighted with it, for it had thrust Nick Carter into her power much more quickly and certainly than she had ever supposed it could be done.

She had not been seated at the table with them a full minute, before she was perfectly assured in her own mind that the man opposite her was Nick Carter, and it did not occur to her to doubt that the other man was one of his assistants—it made no difference to her which one.

And now, while she threatened the detective with death if he should make any overt omission, she was eagerly casting about in her mind how to get him entirely into her power to do with as she would without alarming the others that were present there.

She knew that Nick Carter understood and realized the danger as thoroughly as she did; but she also knew that he was extremely resourceful whenever danger threatened, and that she might only count upon him as captured and overcome entirely when he was bound and gagged or dead before her.

As for Nick, when Madge uttered the threat to him, he returned her gaze steadfastly, at the same time reaching out a little farther with the hand that was resting upon the table, and then he replied quietly and in the same low tone that she had employed:

"I took every one of those things into consideration, Madge, when I came here. Now, I want to know if you intend to shout out that name, and give the alarm, as you have threatened to do, or if you will sit there quietly where you are, pretending to be interested in the drink in front of you, and talk it over calmly."

She shrugged her shoulders and again leaned back in her chair, but at the same time drawing it a little nearer to the table.

"As you please," she said. "I don't care to precipitate matters and break up the party here unless you force me to do so—at least, not just yet."

"Madge," said Nick, "you think that you have me in your power. You believe that by shouting out my name I would be killed. That is doubtless quite true, but before that killing was accomplished I should have done a little execution on my own account, and Chick, who is here beside me, is quite ready to do his part. As for Curly, he is an innocent party in this affair, so we won't consider him at all, although you must admit that he would have to take the consequences of bringing me here, which would be far from pleasant."

She nodded and smiled at him fiercely, and then she replied:

"Go on. You were about to tell me that in the sleeve of that arm which is extended toward me over the table you hold a weapon with which you could kill me before I could give the alarm a second time. Very well, I know it, but all the same I am not afraid of it, Nick Carter, any more than I am afraid of you, and you know that I have never been that."

"I know," said Nick.

"Go on, then," she repeated. "What do you want to talk about? Since you wish to talk things over calmly, what did you come here for, anyhow?"

"I came," said Nick, "believing that you were in the city, and knowing that I would find you here if you were. I came because I was determined to find out whether you were, and to put a stop to your career."

She started savagely, but Nick held up his hand and hushed her.

"I am not going to make any arrests in this place, Madge. I am not going to interfere with Mike Grinnel's business, or with his reputation for affording security to his patrons. If every person in this room was my friend instead of my enemy, you, Madge, would be as free to depart in peace when you get ready to do so as you would have been had I not come here."

"That all sounds very fine," she said, "if only I cared to believe it."

"Believe it or not as you please, it is the truth."

"And what did you come here for?"

"I have told you that already. I came to find you."

"And, having found me, to let me go away in peace?"

"I have said that also, I believe."

"Nick Carter," she exclaimed, laughing scornfully, "you are not a good liar."

"I never lie," replied Nick.

"Well," she said, "I will speak my little piece, now that you are through. You are here, and there are two locked doors between you and the street, and there are

between twenty and thirty men in this room now who would rather be killed than let you escape if they knew you were here. I might as well confess to you that eight of those men belong to me. That is, they obey my orders. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"I think," replied Nick quietly, and smiling back at her, "that, with your permission, I will order another round of drinks."

She pushed back her chair petulantly from the table, and half-started to rise from it, but Nick Carter's voice, low, but sharp, halted her.

"Stop, Madge," he said; "keep your seat. This thing has gone too far for either of us to attempt to fool the other. You might as well understand that if there is to be any row precipitated, I will do the precipitating."

She blazed her eyes at him for an instant, and then parted her lips with the evident intention of shouting out his identity.

And, while he did not move to prevent her from doing so, the steady gaze of his eyes somehow overcame her, and she closed them again without making a sound.

"That is better, Madge," he said. "This is a case of diamond cut diamond, only for the moment my diamond is a little harder and sharper than your own. Take my advice and sit where you are."

Curly and Chick had both been absorbed spectators and listeners to this little scene between the detective and Black Madge.

Chick had, of course, made himself ready at any instant to act, no matter what sort of action might be required.

But Curly was distinctly in a quandary.

He knew that it was no fault of Nick's that the discovery had been made, and he also knew that if she was forced to keep silent the identity of Nick Carter would not be discovered by the others present.

If the thing should come to a row, every instinct of Curly's life and profession would force him to take the side of the underworld as against Nick Carter, and his impulse would be that way, too. But his strongest desire at that moment was to prevent an exposure at any cost.

It was for this reason that he now intervened.

"Madge," he said, "listen to me for a minute."

"Hello, Curly," she said, turning her head lazily toward him, "it isn't necessary for you to butt in on this affair."

"I am going to butt in, Madge, just the same. Now, listen to me."

"Go on, then."

"You know where I stand, Madge, and there ain't no reason why I should explain how all this came about; or if you think there is, there ain't going to be any explanation offered anyhow, but the point about it is this: It wouldn't be healthy for you nor for any of us if you should yell out a certain name in this present community, and I want to tell you right now that I won't stand for your doing it. It's up to you to keep still, Madge, and mind your own business, for while I should be with the boys as against Nick Carter to the bitter end, if it actually came to a fight, at the same time I'd blame you for the fight, and although you're a woman you would be the first one I'd look for out of this bunch. Now, I've spoken my piece, and you can go on with yours."

This was a development which Madge had not anticipated, but Curly had spoken so plainly to the point, and his premises were so well taken and so logical from his standpoint, that she could offer no objection.

If she could have left the table for a moment; if she could have had time to think, or if she could have secured an opportunity to exchange half a dozen sentences with any one of the members of her "Band of Hatred," it would have been different, and she might have planned for the overthrow of the detective.

As it was, the circumstances had arrived at such a condition that leaving her chair would be equivalent—so far as her companions were concerned—to the calling out of Nick Carter's name.

Madge knew Curly John, and she knew him for a man who never made idle threats. His reputation among his fellows was that he spoke very rarely, and said very little when he did speak, but that what he said was always to the point, and that he always meant what he uttered.

And so she saw the tables rather turned upon herself.

Instead of Nick Carter being in her power, she was temporarily in his.

The situation had its ludicrous side.

Each was in a sense the prisoner of the other, for while Nick Carter could not hope to escape from that room unless she gave him permission to leave it, she could not rise from the chair upon which she was seated without risking death unless he permitted it.

If only she could have conveyed the shortest kind of a message to Mike Grinnel, or have signaled some word to Slippery, or to Surly Bob, or Gentleman Jim, or Fly Cummings, or Cuthbert, or Maxwell, or The Parson, all of whom were in that room at the time, everything would have been so easy for her.

But she could not leave her chair; neither could she signal to any of these.

Nick Carter's eye was upon her; his arm was extended across the table, and she knew the potency of that arm, as well as something about the strength and fund of resource of the detective.

But the situation was unbearable.

She felt that she could not endure it, and that in some manner it would have to be brought to a close, and at once.

And so she leaned still farther back in her chair, gradually tilting it until it rested poised upon the two rear legs.

And then, with a sudden motion, and at the same instant uttering a scream which rang shrilly through the room, she threw herself directly backward, at the same time kicking up her feet and so striking them fiercely against the under side of the table.

The weight of her body and the force with which she struck the table instantly overturned it, bottles, glasses and all, so that it crashed to the floor in utter confusion.

And at the same instant every one in that room leaped to their feet and reached for their weapons.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE CELLAR.

The action of Black Madge was so sudden and so unlooked for that it came as an entire surprise even to Nick Carter, and the act which overturned the table, coming as it did from a position directly opposite his own, sent the table full upon him, and spilt the contents that had rested upon it into his lap.

More than that, in spite of his effort to resist the force of the attack, his chair was overturned backward, and he found himself the next instant sprawling upon the floor.

But even if he was for an instant put out of business by the incident, there were other things connected with it which worked to his assistance.

Always in a resort of this kind, where there is ever the least likelihood of police interference, there are many arrangements prepared for instantly turning off the lights, and it is the first impulse of every person who finds himself in such a place to "douse the glim" instantly upon the raising of a disturbance, if it is possible to do so.

Again when there is the sudden noise of crashing glass and the appearance of confusion in such a place at such a time, it never can be determined at once what the cause of it is, and as discretion is always the better part of valor, and certainly is counted so among the denizens of the underworld, there were at least a dozen men in that room at the time who leaped for the switch to turn off the lights the instant that Madge upset the table.

Mike Grinnel himself happened to be standing where one of the switches was within reach of his hand, and so it happened that before Nick Carter's chair could reach the floor the place was in total darkness.

Nick Carter was not unaccustomed to experiences of this kind. It was by no means the first time that he had been present in a resort like this one when the lights had been turned off, and it is safe to say that he never in his life entered a room where such a thing was likely to occur without studying his surroundings carefully the moment he was inside, and determining then and there what course he would pursue if such an event should occur.

Consequently, although Madge's action came as an utter surprise to him, he was nevertheless prepared for it. And so was Chick.

When the detective found himself falling, and knew that his chair must topple over, the thought instantly came to him that Chick would escape the greater part of the confusion resulting from it—and he knew that he could rely upon Chick's activity and resource as thoroughly as upon his own.

Nick managed to seize the edge of the table with his hands while falling, and, exerting the great strength of his arms to the utmost, he literally picked it from the floor and hurled it over his head while he was practically lying on his back.

Then, kicking the chair from under him, and half-rolling over—realizing in that instant that Madge could not possibly get upon her own feet as quickly as he could on his—he leaped to his knees, and threw himself forward across the now empty space which the

table had occupied, and so managed to seize the skirt of Black Madge's dress.

One jerk of his strong arms pulled her toward him, and the next instant he had seized her, and by passing one arm around her neck clapped his hand over her mouth, thus preventing her from calling out.

Although she struggled fiercely, clawing with her hands and kicking with her heels, and attempting vainly to scream, the confusion in the room was so great that no one was conscious of what she was doing, save Nick Carter himself, who held her.

And Nick had taken account of the interior of the room long before, as has been already explained.

He knew that behind the bar almost midway in its length there was a small door, which connected with some sort of an apartment back of it.

What that apartment was he did not know, other than that he had seen Grinnel pass out and return through that small door twice since he entered the place, and he concluded that it must be sort of a retiring-room or resting-room—possibly a private office—of the proprietor.

The door was not tall enough for a man to pass through standing in an upright position, and it was considerably narrower than an ordinary door; but all the same, to Nick's idea it offered a safe and secure retreat for the moment if he could but succeed in reaching it.

What was beyond it he did not know. But it was enough for him that if he could get past it before the lights were turned on again that he at least would be out of that crowded room, and have time to catch his breath, and determine what it was best to do.

He regarded Chick as entirely competent to take care of himself.

Therefore, the instant that he seized upon Madge, and stopped her screaming by clapping his hand over her mouth, he pulled himself to his feet, and, holding her struggling form firmly, he carried her safely across the space which intervened between him and the end of the bar—a space which he knew would be practically clear of impedimenta at the moment.

There was one danger in the effort to make his escape by this means, and that was in the three bartenders, who would probably be more on the alert than any one else.

But it is a well-known habit of bartenders at such times to seek safety on the top of the bar instead of behind it, for in the darkness of a barroom fight there is no place so safe as to lie at full length upon the top of the bar.

Therefore Nick calculated that that was exactly what the three bartenders would do, and he figured also that Grinnel, having turned off the lights, would stand silently with his hand upon the switch ready to turn them on again in an instant.

If he could only succeed in carrying Madge behind that bar and through the door already described before the lights were turned on, much would be accomplished.

Things happen very quickly at such times; seconds seem interminably long. If you have ever stopped to hold your breath for a whole minute of time, you will know how long a minute can be.

At all events, the detective reached the end of the bar in safety, and, feeling the back of it with his body, glided around behind it to the spot where he knew the small door to be located, and then, releasing his left hand from the woman he carried long enough to reach for the latch of the door, he pulled it open, passed through, and closed it behind him.

With the hand that was still free he pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and before Madge could escape him he snapped them upon her wrists behind her back and dropped her to the floor, at the same time pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and tying it firmly—much too firmly for her comfort—around her jaws.

His next act was to produce his flash-light and turn it upon the door, where, to his delight, he discovered that it was only necessary to drop a heavy iron bar into place to secure it; and this bar passed entirely across the door and rested in iron slots at either side of it.

He also noticed in that instant that the door was an extremely heavy one, and that the partition through which it opened was a substantial one. Without doubt, the room had been prepared by Mike Grinnel himself with great care as the means of a safe and sure retreat for him in the event of a raid upon his place.

The detective discovered also that there was a gas-jet in the room, and he turned this on and lit the gas at once.

Madge was in the meantime using every effort in her power to pull the handkerchief from her face so that she could cry for help, but now with light sufficient to see what he was about, the detective lost no time in securing her so firmly that she was entirely helpless.

To her baleful glances of utter hatred, he paid not the slightest attention, but he began at once to examine the room with great care, knowing well that there should be another means of entrance to and egress from it than the one he made use of.

For Mike Grinnel, skilled as he was in the habits of the people he dealt with, would never have built for himself a den from which there was no escape after once he had entered it. Although there was no sign of a second door to be seen anywhere, Nick did not despair of finding one, and he began his search first by pulling out the sideboard which stood against the wall and looking behind it.

He next had recourse to a couch, under which he searched for a trap-door, but found none; and then his attention was attracted to an iron safe not quite so high as his head, which stood in one corner of the room.

An iron safe is not a thing which is easily moved from its position, but Nick seized upon it, nevertheless; nor was he surprised when he found that it was so perfectly balanced on the wheels that supported it that it moved readily enough in response to his efforts.

And behind it was the door he sought. It was not over three feet high, and thirty inches in width, but there was a latch upon it mortised into the wood, and there was a hole in the door through which was passed a small steel chain that was attached to a rung fastened to the iron safe. This, of course, was intended to use for pulling the safe back into position after the door had been made use of and the fugitive, whoever he might be, had made his escape.

Nick pulled open the door, thus making it ready for his use, and then quickly returned to Black Madge's side. He raised her in his arms, carried her to the little door, and, having unceremoniously thrust her head first through it, crawled after her, closed the door, and pulled the safe into place again with the aid of the chain.

He found himself now in a narrow corridor, faced by rough bricks on either side of him, evidently constructed between the party-walls of the two buildings, and ten feet in front of him he perceived a flight of steps leading downward.

Again picking Madge up in his arms—he had turned on his flash-light and located the bottom—who was now passive, realizing that it was needless to struggle, he hurried down the narrow stairs to the bottom, and there came upon an iron door fastened with a spring lock on the inside, which he therefore easily opened.

Passing through this and closing it behind him, so that the lock snapped again, he found himself in the cellar beneath the building that adjoined the one in which Mike Grinnel's dive was located.

Across the cellar, and at the far end of it, was a flight of wooden stairs.

Nick regretted at that moment that he did not remember what sort of a place was located next to Grinnel's, but he realized the imperative necessity of getting out of the building into the street as quickly as possible, no matter how he accomplished it, and therefore when he carried his captive up those stairs to the top of them and found there only an ordinary wooden door locked against him, he lost no time in kicking it open and passing through.

When he did so, and when he came out in the room above, it happened that the battery of his own light gave out, and before he could determine his surroundings he was in utter darkness.

This lasted, however, only a moment, and he was in the act of hastening forward toward the front of the house, when with startling suddenness the whole place flashed into brilliant illumination, and he found himself standing at one end of what looked like a Chinese laundry, while directly in front of him, and not many feet distant, was Mike Grinnel and three of the men from his place, confronting him with drawn revolvers in their hands.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN IN THE BED.

The detective knew in that instant that he could no longer hope to save his prisoner; that is, to escape with her, and that the chances were about a thousand to one against his own escape.

That Mike Grinnel was thoroughly incensed, and that he was determined that the detective should never get out of that place alive, was apparent in the cold glitter of his eyes, as he looked at Nick across the barrel of his revolver.

And Nick knew how Grinnel had succeeded in heading him off. He could see in his mind just what the surprise was in the saloon when the lights were again turned on, and it was discovered that one of the strangers who had

come there with Curly had disappeared and had taken Black Madge with him.

Grinnel knew, of course, that there was only one way out of that place, which was through the private door back of the bar into the little room which he used as an office, and thence through that other door behind the safe, through the narrow corridor, down the stairs into the cellar, and then up again into the back end of the Chinese laundry.

And Grinnel had lost no time in summoning to his aid three of his most trusted adherents, and hastening with them to the laundry, where he was ready to head off the detective's retreat.

It had not been difficult for them to get there and be ready for him before he could reach the place with his burden; for he had used up a great deal of time in searching out the secret door behind the safe, and in finding his way through the cellar.

And, moreover, Mike Grinnel was a man of expedient. Having arranged this method of escape for himself, if the necessity of it should arise, he had also prepared the laundry with lights to turn on or to extinguish as he might desire; and, therefore, having reached the laundry and prepared himself and his followers for the coming of the detective, they had only to wait silently in the darkness until they heard him approaching, when Mike switched on the lights with the result that we have already seen.

It was a moment fraught with ghastly peril, and with unnumbered possibilities.

At such times there is always an instant of inaction; an instant when neither party concerned knows quite what to do.

But the detective, as it happened—with the possible exception of Mike Grinnel himself—was the first to recover.

It will be remembered that the detective was carrying Madge in his arms; and now, at the risk of injuring her, realizing that it was the only way by which any possibility of escape could be offered to himself, he raised her over his head at the very instant that the turning on of the lights revealed his enemies, and threw her with all his strength at Mike Grinnel's burly figure.

Of course, not one of the crooks dared to use his weapon, lest Black Madge herself be shot, and it was upon this idea that the detective acted as much as any other.

Nor did it occur to Mike Grinnel that this other whom he had seemed to have now guessed must be Nick Carter, would resort to any such measure as he had, and, therefore, he was not prepared for the missile that was hurled at him.

The body of Madge, flying the short distance across the room, struck Grinnel squarely on the chest, and thus forced him backward against two of the men who were with him; and so in that instant four people all together were huddled in a heap upon the floor, and only one of Nick's visible enemies remained standing.

And, the instant that Nick threw Madge at them, he leaped forward and seized the switch, which was almost at Grinnel's shoulder, where he had been standing; and with a twist of his wrist he turned off the lights as suddenly as they had been turned on.

At the same instant he had taken into consideration the position of the one man of the enemy who was left erect, and no sooner had he turned the switch than he leaped forward toward the spot where he knew that man to be standing.

Nicely calculating the distance, he struck out a savage blow with his right hand, and he heard this last one of his enemies go down in a heap upon the floor.

And then the detective leaped over him toward the door which he had seen during that brief interval of illumination, passed through it, and pushed it shut behind him.

He knew now that he was in the front room of the laundry. He knew that there should be tables and benches there, and it was only the work of an instant for him to reach out and feel around until he seized upon one, and then, exerting his great strength, he pulled it over in front of and against the door he had closed.

A faint light shone into that room from the street, and Nick instantly leaped for the front door of the shop, reaching it only to find that it had been locked when the others entered.

But the door was of glass, and, hesitating not an instant, he seized a chair and hurled it into the street, thus making a hole through which he had no difficulty in passing.

The next instant he was outside, and for the moment, at least, safe.

But the detective knew that he was by no means free from pursuit as yet, although he had no intention of fleeing very far; and as he was about to turn away, he re-

membered that he had left Chick inside the saloon surrounded by rascals of every kind.

It was not in the nature of Nick Carter to desert any one under such circumstances, much less his favorite Chick.

While he hesitated he heard a noise behind him in the laundry that was made by Grinnel and his three followers attempting to escape from the predicament into which he had thrown them.

He remembered then that Grinnel and his men must have come out of the dive by the front door or by the hall-door entrance in order to have reached the laundry when they did, and he figured in that instant that it was more than likely that in doing so they had not thought to fasten the door behind them, or had purposely, perhaps, left it unlocked in order that they might be able to return with all the more speed to the safety and seclusion of the dive.

He heard them pounding against the door against which he had pulled the heavy bench, and he knew that at least three or four minutes must elapse before they could make their escape; and in that moment he decided to return to the saloon at whatever cost, if it were possible for him to get there.

A few quick bounds brought him to the front door of the dive—that door which swung so ceaselessly to and fro during the legal hours of its business—he knew, although he tried it softly, that it was securely locked against him, and he passed on to the hall door of the house, which was just beyond it. This, as he had guessed might be the case, was not fastened, and he pushed it open and passed beyond it.

He found himself in a hallway of black darkness, and while he paused for a moment to listen, not a sound of any kind came to his ears, a fact which led him to determine that either Chick had already been done for by the frequenters of the dive, or else that he had been made a prisoner and was lying somewhere bound and gagged, awaiting the return of Grinnel.

It will be remembered that Nick's flash-light had become useless, so now he crept his way along the hall until his hand came in contact with a balustrade; and here he paused, uncertain whether to proceed through the hall to the rear of the building, which he knew should give an entrance to the saloon, or to ascend the stairs and temporarily hide himself in the neighborhood of the house.

Everything considered, this latter course was distinctly the best one, since, doubtless, it would never occur to Mike Grinnel or to any of those who were concerned with him in this incident, that Nick Carter would have the temerity to return to the same house from which he had just escaped.

Therefore, if safety were the only incentive for Nick Carter, to act upon this was the very best course he could have adopted.

But Nick was ever one who considered his own safety last.

His whole impulse now was to do the best that could be done to get Chick out of the predicament into which he had been thrust; and he considered that to be the very method he had adopted.

Nick knew the characteristics of the people against whom he was pitted well enough to understand that the moment they realized that he had escaped them they would simply return to the saloon of the dive to discuss it—and doubtless also to call to severe account those who were responsible for the affair.

Such a discussion would not take place until two things had happened—until they were satisfied utterly that Nick Carter had escaped them, and also that they had Chick so thoroughly in their power that he could not hope to escape.

And so the detective ascended the stairs softly, and as silently as a shadow.

He had no means of knowing, of course, the character of the rooms on those floors, or their location; but, nevertheless, the circumstances were such that he had to take desperate chances, and therefore when he reached the landing he felt with his hands silently along the wall until he came to a door, when he felt slowly down it until he touched the knob.

This he turned, trying to open the door which resisted him, showing that it was locked.

There is a way to force a door—that is, an ordinary door—and at the same time make very little noise. It is done—if the door opens inward—by seizing the knob firmly with both hands, having turned it, and then by bracing the body with one knee pressed firmly against the door directly under the knob.

In this position, if it is assumed by a strong man, every effort may be centered upon one sudden impulse forward, which, while there is no visible or perceptible impact, will place all of the muscular force and weight

of the man directly upon the point where the latch or lock of the door is located; and it is a very substantial lock which will not give way under this sort of pressure when it is correctly applied.

Nor is there any perceptible noise more than that of the tearing out of the slot which holds the bolt of the lock.

When this door gave way before the detective it admitted him to a square room at the rear of the house—a room in which an oil-lamp, turned low, was burning; and as he closed the door behind him and pulled a chair in front of it to hold it shut, he saw a figure of a man who had been sleeping fully clothed on a bed in one corner of the room start to an upright posture, staring and apparently alarmed.

"Who——" the man started to exclaim, but the detective interrupted him with a sharp command.

"Shut up," he ordered, "if you let out a peep you will be the worse for it."

Without a word the man sank back upon the pillow, apparently not in the least alarmed now, and evidently believing that the person who had entered his room was only another like himself, who, having gotten into some sort of trouble, was fleeing from his pursuers; and by all precedents, if the man was pursued to that room, it would be infinitely better for its permanent occupant to appear to be still sleeping soundly, than to have any of the aspect of a confederate, and so he closed his eyes again as if he were still alone.

Nick waited a moment at the door, listening for sounds outside, and while he stood there he heard the hall door from the street open, and presently close again, and he could distinguish the tramping of feet along the hall as several persons passed to the rear of the house, evidently on their way to the saloon again.

As soon as these noises had ceased, he knew that he was for the moment at least safe from pursuit. He piled other things against the door, and then deliberately crossed the room to the lamp and turned it up, after which he strode over to the bedside.

"Now, my friend," he said to its occupant, "I'll have to ask you to wake up for about three minutes."

"All right," was the simple response. "What do you want? Who are you, anyway? And what in blazes do you mean by bursting into my room in this way?"

"First," said Nick, "I want to know who you are, and whether you belong here or not?"

"Oh, you make me tired," grunted the man on the bed. "I'm Phil, the head day-bartender down-stairs."

"All right, Phil," said Nick, smiling. "Get up on your feet where I can look at you, and where you can answer a few questions for me."

"Oh, what's eating you?" growled the bartender. "I ain't been to bed more than an hour. Let me sleep."

Instead of replying, the detective reached out his hand, and, seizing Phil by the shoulder, jerked him from the bed to the floor, stood him on his feet, and then seated him forcibly upon one of the wooden chairs near at hand—so forcibly that his jaws snapped together like the cracking of a nut.

"Now, will you be good?" asked Nick, smiling grimly.

"Yes, curse you," was the surly reply. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Well, talk on, can't you? I'm listening. Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you who I am," answered the detective, "and after I have done so, perhaps you will consent to listen to me. I am Nick Carter, the detective, and I want to make a little bit of use of you right now, Philip."

CHAPTER X.

THE CRIMINAL'S COMPACT.

"How long have you been here in this room?" asked the detective sharply.

"I told you about a minute ago," was the surly reply. "About an hour."

"Where were you before you came here?"

"That's none of your infernal business."

"I want to know if you were down-stairs in the saloon?"

"No, I wasn't, if that will satisfy you."

"Have you been there at all to-night?"

"Yes, I was there about three hours ago."

"Was Black Madge there when you were there?"

A cunning leer came into the fellow's face before he answered, and then he replied by asking another question.

"Who's Black Madge?" he demanded.

"You know well enough who Black Madge is," insisted the detective; "and, Phil, if you keep a civil tongue in your head and answer my questions as I ask them, it will be all the better for you. If you do not——"

"Well, what then?"

"If you do not, there are several little things connected with your career which will make it unpleasant to have the inspector up at headquarters question you about."

"Well, I ain't a-goin' to give away anybody down-stairs, no matter what happens," said the bartender.

"I'm not asking you to give anybody away. I merely asked you to answer my questions."

"Well, go ahead and ask them. I will answer them if I can."

"Was Black Madge in the saloon down-stairs when you were there?"

"Yes. She was."

"Has she been in the habit of coming here frequently of late?"

"I can't tell you for certain about that. You know I'm on duty in the daytime, and people of her kind come only at night."

"Answer my question," said the detective sternly. "You know the answer to it, and you understand that I know you do."

"Well, I guess she's been in most every night for the last two weeks."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"No."

"Do you know any of the gang that is traveling with her?"

"Yes; I guess I know most of that bunch."

"Well, Phil, I want you to tell me their names; every one of them. That is, every one that you are certain forms one of her gang."

"There ain't anything certain about it, Carter. I'll tell you that on the level. All I know about her and her gang is guesswork. But if I was asked to mention them I should say that, judging from appearance, there is about eight of them. Besides, Madge has got something up her sleeve, but what it is I haven't an idea. It looks to me, though, as if they were getting ready to crack some pretty big crib, and make the haul of their lives. Now, if you're on to that lay, and your only purpose is to prevent them doing it, so that I ain't telling you anything that will go for putting them behind the bars, I will be on the level and tell you all I know."

"You will have to tell me anyhow, Phil," returned Nick quietly. "If you don't do it willingly, I know of more than one way to compel you to do it. However, you may rest easy upon the point you have made. I am not at the present moment seeking to put any of them behind the bars; only Black Madge herself. She has got to go there, whether you talk to me or not."

"Well," said the bartender, "she don't cut any ice with me, anyhow. She's too stuck up for my kind."

"All right," said Nick; "tell me the names of those eight men."

"There's Slippery Al, Surly Bob, Gentleman Jim, Fly Cummings, Joe Cuthbert, Jean Maxwell, and The Parson. Oh, and there's Scar-faced Johnny; I forgot him. Now, I'll leave it to you, Carter, if that ain't a likely bunch."

"And they were all in the room down-stairs to-night," murmured the detective meditatively.

"What!" exclaimed the bartender in astonishment. "do you mean to say that you have been inside that saloon to-night?"

"Certainly."

"Would you mind telling me how you got there?"

"Never mind all that, Phil. That is not what I am here for—to explain things to you. Do you know where Black Madge lives, or where she can be found besides in this saloon?"

"I don't know anything about her more than I've told you."

The detective looked around the room for a moment, and discovered that one of its articles of furniture was a tall, old-fashioned pier-glass mirror which reflected the full length of a person who stood before it. Then he turned around and commanded the bartender to stand on his feet, studied his appearance carefully, and then he shook his head.

"It won't do," he muttered.

"What won't do?" asked Phil.

"I was considering the possibility of making myself up in your likeness and of venturing in that disguise to go to the saloon," replied the detective.

"What! right now?" asked Phil.

"Yes."

"And you don't think you could do it, eh?"

"No, Phil. You're too tall and too big. I never could make myself up to look like you in the world. I will have to think of some other way."

Phil was thoughtful for a moment, while the detective was absorbed in his own study of the situation, and then he looked up suddenly and exclaimed:

"Why don't you send me down-stairs for you?"

"Because," replied Nick, "the moment you got there you would call up the whole gang, and have them up here after me inside of a minute."

"I wouldn't, either, Carter. Not if I agreed not to."

"I can't trust you, Phil."

Again that cunning leer came into the dissipated face of the bartender, and he said quickly:

"You can trust me, if you pay me enough for it."

"A bribed man is usually the first to betray," said Nick.

"Not if the bribe is big enough, Carter."

"Do you mean to say that I can trust you to go down into the saloon and to come back here presently and tell me exactly what the situation is?"

"You can if you pay me enough. I told you that before."

"It isn't a question of pay, Phil; that is, the amount of pay. I would be willing to give you almost anything if I thought you would perform exactly what I want done, and return to me with the information I desire, without saying or doing anything to betray my presence here."

"Well, I'm your huckleberry, if you want me to do it. All you've got to do on your part is to cough up the dough."

The detective, who always went well supplied with funds, took a roll of bills from his pocket, and slowly counted out one hundred dollars, which, without a word, he handed to the bartender.

"I am going to take you at your word, Phil," he said slowly, "and that is the first instalment only of what I shall give you if you perform the service well and thoroughly, and do exactly as I instruct you to do, no more and no less."

"And if I do it all as you tell me to do, how much more do I get?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

"I'm listening, you bet your life."

"I came here to-night, Phil, with my first assistant, Chick; he is down-stairs somewhere now, probably bound and gagged and thrown under a table, or behind the bar, or locked up in a closet. I want you to go down there, and find out exactly what has become of Chick, and what has happened to him. I want you to pick up all the information you can about what has happened there to-night—that is, what they are saying about it. You will have to remain there perhaps half an hour to accomplish this, and all of that time you must be extremely careful not to let it appear that you know anything about me at all."

"Well, and after that what am I to do?"

"When you know what has become of Chick, and where he is now, figure out the best way in which we can set him at liberty at once, or, if you can manage to do it before you return to me, do it. If you succeed in setting him at liberty yourself within the next half-hour, I will, before the sun goes down to-morrow, give you nine hundred dollars more, and that will be a pretty good nest-egg for you, Phil."

"I'll do the job; you needn't fret."

"Wait, there is another thing."

"Well, sir?"

"If you find that you cannot liberate him yourself without assistance, you are to return to me at once, and we will plan together how it can best be accomplished. When we have done that, if through your aid I succeed in getting Chick safely away from here, you shall have the nine hundred plunks extra just the same."

"On the level, Carter?"

"Yes, on the level, Phil. I mean every word I say."

"Well, I'm the huckleberry that can do it."

"Wait, Phil, before you start there is one more thing still."

"What! another?"

"Yes. This. After we have gotten safely out of this pickle, and the place has quieted down, it will be up to you to find out for me where Black Madge hangs up her clothes. It is important, Phil, that I should get that woman back into the prison where she belongs."

"I ain't no stool-pigeon," grumbled the bartender.

"Neither am I asking you to be a stool-pigeon," said the detective. "What I want you to do is simple enough. I am not laying any plans against any of the regular frequenters of this place. It's only Black Madge I want, and you have confessed already that you don't like her. Now, it's up to you if you want to go through this whole job, and do it right. And, Phil, if you will stick to me and see the whole game through the way I have outlined it to you, another thousand goes with the first one."

"Geewhiz! do you mean that?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, then, I'm game for the whole layout, and I will see it through to the end, but I don't want you to forget, Carter, that, if anything ever comes of it so that

my part in this business is found out by any one of that crowd down there now, male or female, I wouldn't give a bunch of snatch and snap for my chances of being alive twenty-four hours afterward."

"They won't find it out through me," said the detective. "If they find it out at all it will be through you. And there's one thing more you must remember, Phil, and that is if you betray me you will be in a whole lot worse fix than you would be if your friends downstairs discover your treachery. For if you do betray me, I will never let up on you, Phil, until I see you behind the bars for a term of years that will make you an old man before you come out again."

CHAPTER XI.

THE GLARE OF A LIGHTED MATCH.

When the bartender had taken his departure, Nick found a cigar in one of his pockets, and seated himself to smoke quietly until Phil should return.

But when more than half an hour later the cigar was consumed, and he had thrown it aside, he began to feel a sense of uneasiness that the man should be gone so long a time.

However, he realized that it was no easy task that Phil had undertaken, and that he might well occupy an hour or more in accomplishing it.

He had no more cigars to smoke, but he seated himself resolutely in a chair, determined to wait with patience until his messenger should return.

There was a small clock, ticking away merrily on the mantel, at the far end of the room, and the detective watched it while the minute-hand worked its way slowly around the dial, until an hour, then an hour and a quarter, and, finally, an hour and twenty minutes had elapsed since the departure of the bartender.

His impatience was now so great, and his natural distrust of the confederate he had employed was so prominent in his mind that he left his chair, having first extinguished the light, and, going to the door, opened it softly and peered outside.

The hallway was in utter darkness, the same as when he was there last, and although he listened intently, he could not hear the suggestion of a sound from the lower regions of the house. After waiting a few moments longer he tiptoed forward cautiously to the stairs, and descended them, being careful to step as closely as possible to the spindles of the balustrade, in order that they might not creak beneath his weight, and thus alarm others in the house.

In this way he gained the lower floor.

He was somewhat handicapped to be without his flash-light, but he remembered quite distinctly the location of the sound he had heard two hours earlier, when the party from the laundry had followed him in, and passed through the hallway to a rear door.

Now he sought that door by following carefully along the wall until he came to it.

But, although he searched diligently for many minutes he could not find so much as a suggestion of a door anywhere.

He remembered then that in all probability there was no perceptible door at all; that the door which was there somewhere was concealed in the wainscoting in some way, or otherwise hidden from casual observation. To have maintained a door of entrance to the saloon from that hallway would have rendered it entirely unnecessary for Grinnel to keep up his private entrance to the saloon from the other street. Nick's only method of finding it now was to light a match, and this he hesitated to do, not knowing what warning its glare might convey to others.

But there was no alternative, and presently he began his search by lighting matches one after another, permitting them to flare up sufficiently for a moment's vision, and then throwing them quickly to the floor, after the manner adoped by burglars when they were engaged in robbing a house before the pocket flash-light was invented.

He was not long in discovering the entrance he sought.

The walls along the hallway were not plastered; they were merely built up with matched boards, which had stood there unpainted for so long a time that they had achieved a veneer of filth and dirt which made them look, in the flare of the match, like polished mahogany.

But he could easily see where there was a keyhole cut into one of these boards, and although around it there was no other evidence of a door, he knew that if he could turn the tumblers in that lock it would be revealed to him.

The friends of Nick Carter know perfectly well how small a task it is to him to manipulate an ordinary lock with that little instrument he always carries in his pocket—a little picklock of his own invention.

As he supposed, the instant the bolt of the lock was shot back the door opened easily and noiselessly in his grasp, and from beyond it he could at once hear the murmur of distant voices; also very far ahead of him and beneath what was evidently another door he could perceive a gleam of light.

He stepped through and closed it after him, but, realizing that it was more than likely that he might wish to leave in a hurry, he left it unlocked.

And now he tiptoed forward to the door beneath which the light shone, and, getting upon his hands and knees, held his ear down where he could hear with more distinctness.

The effect was almost the same as if he were inside the saloon.

Strangely enough, also, it was Madge's voice that came to him first, for it appeared that she was seated near that very door, and by the answers that were returned to her Nick knew that no less a person than Mike Grinnel himself was her companion. And they were speaking in low tones, but, nevertheless, every word they uttered could be heard distinctly by the detective.

It was in the midst of their conversation, evidently, that Nick began to listen, and Madge was saying:

"I swore then, Mike, that I would be even with him, and that if I ever succeeded in getting out of that prison where he put me I would never rest another minute until Nick Carter was placed beyond the power of injuring anybody."

"You bit off a little more than you could chew, didn't you, Madge?" asked Mike Grinnel, in his slow, even voice, in which he never permitted a sign of emotion.

"No, I didn't," she retorted. "I made some mistakes, maybe. I shouldn't, for instance, have written him the letter I did."

"What was the letter, Madge?"

"Like a fool I wrote him a threatening letter, in which I told him to look out for me. That was my vanity, I suppose. I wanted him to know that I was on his track. I wanted to worry him; to give him something to think of, and a lot of things to look out for."

"Well, what then, Madge?"

"It was then, Mike, that I began to get the guns together, Slippery Al, and Gentleman Jim, and the others, and, of course, I made this place our headquarters."

"That, Madge, is just what you shouldn't have done. That's what I'm finding fault with you about now."

"Well," she said, "it's done, and it can't be helped; and Nick Carter has been here, and he's gotten away again; but, all the same, we've got Chick in our power, and if I do to him as I feel like doing now, he will regret the day that he ever took my trail."

"If you leave him where he is now, Madge, he'll do that," said Grinnel, laughing softly.

"Why, what would happen to him there?" she demanded quickly.

"For one thing the rats would probably eat him up before very long, and it wouldn't be the first meal of that kind they've had down there, either."

"You didn't tell me where you put him," said Madge.

"I don't tell anybody exactly where that place is, Madge. It's a little hole that I've had dug out underneath the cellar of this house; if it was anywhere in the old country it would be called a dungeon; as it is, I call it the grave—people who go there have a habit of never coming out again."

The detective was anxious to know what had become of Phil, the bartender.

It was evident that the man had done nothing to betray the detective, since these two were talking so quietly just inside the door where Nick was listening.

The next words, while they did not exactly reassure him, made him think that, after all, the bartender might be carrying out his contract by attempting to set Chick at liberty himself.

"Is that where you sent Phil a few moments ago?" she asked. "Down there to the dungeon where you put Chick?"

The detective could hear Grinnel chuckle, and then reply:

"Yes, Madge, I sent him down there to fasten the young fellow up, so that there would be no chance of his getting loose. You see he was senseless when we chucked him in there, and I forgot to make him fast, as a sailor would say, but there are staples in the wall down there, and there are chains fastened to those staples, and there are nice little steel bracelets at the end of those chains, that fit beautifully around a man's ankles. I sent Phil down to lock them fast."

"I thought nobody knew where that place was except yourself," said Madge quickly.

"Oh, Phil's all right. I have to have some confidence in my men here, or I couldn't run the place."

"All the same," the detective heard her murmur, "I'd rather you had left Chick to me. They're a slippery lot, those detectives, and I shall be uneasy——"

The detective heard no more of what she said, for at that instant he was greatly startled by hearing a sound behind him, and evidently beneath him, the consequence being that he paid no further attention to the conversation beyond the door.

Indeed, he drew back away from it, and softly rose to his feet in order that he might be thoroughly prepared for anything that should happen; and while he stood there he was conscious of a cold, damp draft of air blown into his face—air that smelled as if it might come from the cellar—and he was somehow conscious that a trap-door had been lifted, while the next moment he was aware that somebody was climbing through it into that narrow hallway—somebody who was not more than ten or twelve feet away from him. How he had wished for his little flash-light then.

Once he imagined that he could hear a faint whisper, and a sharp, warning hiss for silence immediately following it.

Then it came back to him suddenly, all that he had heard Mike Grinnel say to Madge about the dungeon in the house, and the bartender's errand to it.

He thought then that the people who had raised themselves through the trap—and he was sure that there were two of them—must be Phil and Chick, the latter having been liberated by the former; and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he struck a match, and held it into the faces of the two men. The glare of the match shone directly into the face of Chick.

CHAPTER XII.

BLACK MADGE CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

But the flaring up of the match also developed another rather startling fact, and that was the presence of Curly, who, with the bartender, Phil, was standing directly behind Chick.

The light also discovered Nick Carter to the others, as it discovered them to him, and, although it burned but a moment, it was a revelation to all the parties concerned. It was Phil, the bartender, who acted more quickly than the others in this somewhat confusing moment of the encounter, for, with admirable presence of mind, he stepped quickly forward, and, reaching out his hands, managed to pull the others toward him until their heads were so close together that the faintest whisper could be heard, and then he said:

"Follow me along the corridor into the front hall. We can talk there."

They did so, and presently they stood together in the front hallway beside the stairs beyond the hidden doorway which Nick had discovered. And during the time they occupied in getting to this point, Nick, who realized that the disguise he wore was no longer of any importance, busily engaged himself in removing it, or, at least, the facial part of it, so that, although in the dark they could not see him, he had restored himself, nevertheless, to his proper person.

"Now, Curly," said the detective, "tell me what this all means. I don't understand it at all."

"Let me talk," interrupted Phil. "It's this way, Mr. Carter. When you escaped from the barroom through the little door into the boss' sanctum, you had no sooner gone than Grinnel switched on the lights again, and your absence was discovered.

"Then it was that the whole bunch lit on to Curly and Chick here, with both feet, downed them, trussed them up, and when Chick was taken to the cellar below, to feed the rats, if he had been left there long enough, Curly was fired along with him. I tell you right now, Mr. Carter, it's all up with Curly in this place. He never can make himself good with this bunch again as long as he lives, and it's up to him to light out now, for good and all, unless he wants to turn up his toes and go to the morgue."

The detective turned to Curly again, and once more struck a match so that they could all see the faces of one another.

"Is that straight, Curly?" he asked.

"That's about the size of it, Mr. Carter."

"Then," said Nick, "am I to understand that the occurrences of this evening have released me from my promise to you to make no arrests in this place, or any arrest of any one who is now in this place within twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, sir, the promise is all off. You can do as you've a mind to. It would suit me to a T if you would gather in the whole push."

"Thank you, Curly," said Nick. "That statement of yours lets me out of a peck of trouble, for having given the promise, of course I would not break it, and I could

not quite see how we could carry this thing through to a finish without."

He was silent for a moment after that, and then he asked:

"Can I rely upon you, Curly, to stand by me through what is to come?"

"To the last ditch, Mr. Carter," was the emphatic response.

"And you, Philip. What about you?"

"Well," was the slow reply, for the man was evidently considering his words with very great care, "I guess my usefulness in this place is just about over. When the boss finds out that Curly and Chick have both gotten out of the dungeon below, he will know mighty well who it was that let them out, and that will mean yours truly for the dead wagon in about fifteen minutes, so I think, Mr. Carter, that I'd better tie up to you while I've got the chance. I am not a crook myself, and never have been one, although I have consorted with them, and been companions with them for a good many years."

"And will you see the thing through to the finish, Phil?" asked Nick again.

"I will do just as Curly said he would do. I'll stand by you to the last ditch."

"Are you all ready to obey my orders exactly as I shall give them?" asked Nick again, slowly.

"We are," came the unanimous response.

"In this case," said the detective, "I am going to make a desperate effort to find out what a bold stroke will do, and here is my plan:

"We will go back together to that door before which I was standing a moment ago, which, I conclude, from its character, is rather a flimsy——"

"It is that," said Phil.

"And after we get there we will stand silently for a moment, each one of you preparing for the signal which I shall give. When I say, 'Now,' I will throw myself against the door, and burst it open, and as I do so, and leap into the room, you three are to follow me, one after the other, as quickly as possible.

"You, Phil, will make directly for the electric switch, and you will see to it, no matter what happens, that the room is not plunged in darkness.

"You, Curly—by the way, have you any weapons about you, Curly?"

"I have got two guns in my pocket, all right."

"Very well; you, Curly, the moment you get into the room, will draw your two guns, and level them at the crowd.

"After that all you have to do is to follow the lead of Chick and myself, and protect yourselves until the fight is over—if there is a fight.

"I reckon I can do that, too, Mr. Carter," said Curly.

"I haven't a doubt of it, Curly. I want you to remember not to shoot too quick, and under no circumstances to shoot to kill, unless it is absolutely necessary; as a matter of fact, I don't expect that we will have much trouble, for when they see us in the room, fully armed, and hear the first words that I shall utter, I think we will have no difficulty in carrying our point."

There was nothing more said then, and Nick turned away and led them quickly back again to the door, near which he had heard the conversation between Black Madge and Mike Grinnel.

For a moment they stood there, waiting to get their breath, and to prepare their muscles and sinews and nerves for the ordeal to which they were about to be put; and then from the detective came a low and emphatic—"Now!"

The instant that the detective shouted out this word he plunged forward, throwing his shoulder heavily against the flimsy door already mentioned, so that it was burst from its lock and from its hinges at the same time, and was sent flying half-way across the room.

But even before the clatter which followed the crash had subsided, Nick Carter, with a pistol in either hand, had leaped across the threshold, and with one more bound arrived at the spot directly beside Mike Grinnel.

Turning the weapon about while he approached, he brought the butt-end of it down, with a resounding whack, upon Grinnel's skull, sending him tumbling to the floor, and then he straightened up, with both arms extended, and the muzzles of his pistols wavering from form to form of the astonished throng in the room, and he cried out:

"Hands up, every one of you. I am here after just one person. The rest of you I don't want, unless somebody interferes with me, and if you do interfere there are enough outside of this house, without doubt, to take you all in."

When he leaped across the threshold the others followed him, as he had directed, and, having already cautioned Chick in a whisper to look out for Madge, and

feeling sure that the others would do their respective duties, as he had directed, Nick had no fear whatever of the result.

A collection of criminals assembled as these were are always glad to hear that there is only one among them who is "wanted," for each one seems instinctively to know that he is not "it."

And Nick Carter knew the criminal class so well that he was certain that this announcement would prevent any immediate attack upon him by the twenty or thirty men who were gathered there.

Having heard this statement, and having, also, taken due notice of his suggestion that there were plenty of reenforcements outside the building, although it will be remembered that the detective had not explained how far outside they were, and remembering that a considerable time had elapsed since Nick Carter left that room before, they were one and all willing to wait a moment before beginning what might be an unnecessary attack, which would be sure to send many of them to prison before it was over. And so they waited, casting furtive glances at one another, many of them with their hands upon their weapons, and all of them ready to fight, if need be, but quite as ready to avoid a fight, if it were policy to do so.

"Now, listen to me," said Nick Carter. "I came here to-night to get Black Madge, and I know by the sounds I have heard behind me since I entered the room just now that she has got a pair of bracelets on her that she doesn't like to wear. I am going to take her away with me, and she is going to be sent back to the prison from which she escaped, and if there is anybody in this crowd that interferes with me, or offers to do so, it will be very much the worse for that person.

"On the other hand, if I am not interfered with, we shall go away quietly with Madge, and what the rest of you may do after that does not concern me. You have my word for it, and you all know that when Nick Carter gives his word, he keeps it. Now, answer me, somebody, and let him speak for all. Does what I say go?"

A voice from the far end of the room replied instantly:

"I say it goes, for one."

"Then answer, all of you," said the detective.

"It goes. You bet it goes."

In their eagerness to answer his request they came near to all shouting at once.

"Thank you," said Nick, smiling. "Now, I have one more word to say, and then we will take our departure.

"There are eight men here whose names I will call, and I want them each to take this as a warning from me. They are Scar-faced Johnny; a man called Slippery Al; Surly Bob, whose career I know; Gentleman Jim, who, for the good of his health, ought to take a vacation on the other side of the ocean; Joe Cuthbert; Eugene Maxwell; and, last, but not least, is the man who is known as The Parson, and that same Parson had better get himself out of New York as quickly as possible.

"I am speaking now to those eight whose names I have mentioned. I know that you have all joined in with an organization created by Black Madge. I know, or think I know, the purpose of that organization. I will give all of you twenty-four hours to get out of the city of New York, and if any one of you is found inside of the limits of the city after that time, look out for squalls."

There was a low murmur around the room following upon this speech by the detective, but whether in protest or approbation, the detective did not concern himself to discover.

With calm deliberation he turned his back upon them all, and motioned to Chick, who had Madge securely handcuffed to his own wrist, to precede him through the door.

Then he motioned to Curly and to Phil to pass through it also.

And, then, stepping himself to the door, he turned about upon the threshold, and faced the crowd once more.

"One last word to you all," he said. "He among you who hurts Curly John, or Phil, the bartender, for this night's work, or attempts to do so, hurts me. I bid you good night."

* * * * * * * *

It is only necessary to add that, within forty-eight hours of that time, Black Madge found herself again in the prison-house of that State for which she had expressed such abounding contempt, and that, at her trial, which followed soon after, she was sentenced to serve ten years in the State prison, where she is at this day.

THE END.

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Never has Burt L. Standish written such interesting tales of the adventures of the Merriwell brothers, Frank and Dick, as are now appearing in this weekly. Mr. Standish has a world-wide circle of friends and he is putting forth his best efforts to amuse and entertain them. Boys, you have no idea of what a grand feast he is preparing for you. Tip Top's stories are going to astonish you. Do not fail to buy this library.

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STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY THURSDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Diamond Dick and his son, Bertie, are true men of the Western plains. They are noble-hearted fellows who don't impose on the weaker man and who don't let anyone else do it if they can help it.

You ought to read how they clean up a mining camp of the dishonest gamblers and other toughs who usually prey on the uneducated miners.

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549—Diamond Dick's Deadly Snowball; or, Tooth and Nail on Black Butte.
550—Diamond Dick, Editor; or, A Rattling Surprise for Lame Dog.
551—Diamond Dick's Stand-off; or, A Battle with Spooks on Hallowe'en.
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A GOLD MINE FOR OUR BOYS!

Second Grand Letter Competition

WE received so many hundreds of really excellent letters from readers of the **Rough Rider Weekly** in response to our first offer of gold dollars, that the Committee awarding the twenty leading prizes had considerable difficulty in carrying out their work; which, however, was finally done, the names printed, and the rewards sent forward. From time to time we shall print in our Chat Columns all these letters entering into the competition. And we also hope that every one who participated in the first contest will decide to take advantage of our second great offer. Tell us what, in your mind, a cracking good story of

RANCH AND RANGE LIFE

should be, and whether these stories by Mr. Ned Taylor fill the bill. We believe they stand in a class by themselves; and from many a Western cattle State we daily receive letters full of praise and enthusiasm for the work of

OUR COWBOY AUTHOR

which letters are written by those entirely familiar with life on the prairie ranches, and who would laugh to scorn stories by an author whom they knew never could have ridden a bucking bronco. Make up your mind to try for these golden prizes right away. Even if you fail to secure one of the twenty leading prizes, we expect to send a splendid consolation offering to every one who competes. Let us know in what way these tales of the Wild West appeal to you, and what you have done to influence your boy pards to read them regularly.

¶ The competition is open from April 1 until October 1, 1907, when the prizes will be awarded, full name and address of every winner being published in the **Rough Rider Weekly.**

HERE ARE THE PRIZES

$10 in Gold for the Best Letter.
$5 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$2.50 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
$1 in Gold for Each of the Ten Next Best Letters.

¶ The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to "Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition," care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump in and resolve to win a cash prize.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK

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OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication,

Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.